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JAQUES IN PRAISE OF FOLLY

In *As You Like It* Shakespeare follows a custom rather common in his plays of adopting his plot and characters with little modification from some earlier work and then adding a group of subordinate characters not found in his main source. These are often comic characters and may be drawn either from life or from some other literary source than that used for the main part of the play. In the case of *As You Like It* the story follows quite closely Lodge's euphuistic novel *Rosalynde*. The chief variation from the novel is to be found in the introduction of one of the most interesting and puzzling characters in the play, Jaques, and a group of fools and rustics who furnish material for his melancholy philosophizing; none of these is to be found in Lodge's story.

In general, Shakespeare's fondness for fools and clowns is a survival from the literature of the early part of the sixteenth century. The growing distrust of the philosophy and learning of the Middle Ages at that time produced a large amount of satirical literature intended to show the folly of the professional wise men by contrast with the real wisdom of those usually accounted fools. Most famous and most influential of the books on fools were Brant's *Narrenschiff* and Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*. For more than a century the latter remained among the most popular of books. It may be assumed without hesitation that Shakespeare was acquainted with it; but I believe that the introduction of the characters above referred to into *As You Like It* was directly due to the dramatist's reading of Erasmus' satire.

Jaques is a man of the world in whom contemplation of its follies has produced weariness and a conviction that fools are really the only class of mankind worthy of envy and admiration. This conviction he expresses in various forms:

O noble fool!

A worthy fool! Motley's the only wear! . . . ¹

O that I were a fool!

I am ambitious for a motley coat.²

¹ Act II, scene 7, ll. 33-34.

² Act II, scene 7, ll. 42-43.

He is of the opinion that fools have more freedom of speech than others have:

I must have liberty
Withal, as large a charter as the wind,
To blow on whom I please; for so fools have;
And they that are most galled with my folly,
They most must laugh.¹

This is a thought expressed at length in the *Praise of Folly*; the following is typical:

Sed abhorrent à vero Principum aures, dixerit aliquis & hac ipsa de causa, sapientes istos fugitant, quòd vereantur ne quis fortè liberior existat, qui vera magis, quàm jucunda loqui audeat. Ita quidem res habet, invisâ Regibus veritas. Sed tamen hoc ipsum mirè in fatuis meis usu venit, ut non vera modò, verùm etiam aperta convitia cum voluptate audiantur, adeo ut idem dictum, quòd si à sapientis ore proficiscatur, capitale fuerat futurum: à morione profectum, incredibilem voluptatem pariat.²

Jaques' defense of this freedom of ridicule seems very similar to Erasmus' at the close of his Preface:

Why, who cries out on pride,
That can therein tax any private party?
Or what is he of basest function
That says his bravery is not on my cost,
Thinking that I mean him, but therein suits
His folly to the mettle of my speech?
There then; how then? what then? Let me see wherein
My tongue hath wrong'd him. If it do him right,
Then he hath wrong'd himself. If he be free,
Why then my taxing like a wild-goose flies,
Unclaim'd of any man.³

Jam vero ut de mordacitatis cavillatione respondeam, semper hæc ingeniis libertas permissa fuit, ut in communem hominum vitam salibus luderent impune, modo ne licentia exiret in rabiem. . . . At enim qui vitas hominum ita taxat, ut neminem omnino perstringat nominatim, quæso utrum is mordere videtur, an docere potius, ac monere? Alioqui quot obsecro nominibus ipse me taxo? Præterea qui nullum hominum genus prætermittit, is nulli homini, vitiis omnibus iratus videtur. Ergo si quis extiterit, qui sese læsum clamabit, is aut conscientiam prodet suam, aut certe metum.

¹ Act II, scene 7, ll. 47-51.

² Quotations from the *Praise of Folly* are given from the edition printed at Basel in 1676, the only edition now available to me. This quotation is from p. 78.

³ Act II, scene 7, ll. 70-87.

Notes in the various editions to the line in the same scene as the quotations already given,

Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune,

point out that this line is a reference to the proverbial partiality of Fortune for fools; this is to be found in the *Praise of Folly* (pp. 191-92):

Nam id quo pacto fieri queat, cùm ipsa etiam Rhamnusia, rerum humanarum fortunatrix, mecum adeo consentiat, ut sapientibus istis semper fuerit inimicissima? contra stultis etiam dormientibus omnia commoda adduxerit?

A note on this quotes the "common proverb": Quo quisque est stultior, hoc est fortunatior.

Touchstone's conversation with Silvius on the foolish things that love causes men to do and his list of his own absurdities when in love, in the fourth scene of the second act, seems to be suggested by the following passage:

Jam num alio nomine, viris magis commendatæ sunt, quàm stultitiæ? Quid enim est quod illi mulieribus non permittunt? At quo tandem auctoramento, nisi voluptatis? delectant autem non alia re, quàm stultitiâ. Id esse verum non ibit inficias quisquis secum reputârît, quas vir cum muliere dicat ineptias, quas agat nugas, quoties fæminea voluptate decreverit uti.¹

In the first scene of the fifth act Touchstone remembers a saying: "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool." References to Socrates' remark on this subject are to be found in the *Praise of Folly* (cf. p. 107, note):

Socrates modestiæ causâ dicebat, se nihil scire, ridens arrogantem sophistarum professionem, qui se jactabant nihil nescire, hinc Academici nihil affirmabant, sed quod ubique probabile viderent, id sequebantur. Porro Socrates, in *apologia*, dicit se putare idcirco ab Apolline judicatum omnium sapientissimum, quòd se nihil scire sciret.

These various points of similarity all have to do with one topic, folly. The probability that they represent borrowings by Shakespeare from Erasmus rather than mere parallelisms would be very much increased if it could be shown that there are other likenesses in the two works in the expression of thoughts on some topic not

¹ P. 32.

necessarily connected with folly. This can be done. The most famous of Jaques' speeches is that beginning:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts.

This is practically a paraphrase of a passage in the *Praise of Folly* (p. 55):

Porro mortalium vita omnis quid aliud est, quàm fabula quæpiam, in qua alii aliis obtecti personis procedunt, aguntque suas quisque partes, donec choragus educat è proscenio? Qui sæpe tamen eundem diverso cultu prodire jubet, ut qui modò regem purpuratum egerat, nunc servulum pannosum gerat.

Earlier in Erasmus' satire is to be found an account of the various stages of human life very similar to Shakespeare's, though not definitely divided into exactly seven ages. The following is the description of the "last scene of all" (p. 22):

Alioqui capillorum albor, os edentulum, corporis modus minor, lactis appetentia, balbuties, garrulitas, ineptia, oblitio, incogitantia, breviter omnia cætera congruunt. Quoque magis accedunt ad senectam, hoc propius ad pueritiæ similitudinem redeunt, donec puerorum ritu, citra vitæ tædium, citra mortis sensum emigrant è vita.

With this is to be placed a similar description (pp. 62-63):

Mei nimirum muneris est, quòd passim Nestoreâ senectâ senes videtis, quibus jam ne species quidem hominis superest, balbos, deliros, edentulos, canos, calvos, vel ut magis Aristophanicis eos describam verbis, *ῥυπῶντας, κυφούς, ἀθλίους, ῥυσούς, μαδῶντας, νωδούς καὶ ψωλούς*.

The first of these is the more interesting in that it comes at the end of an account of the various ages, some sentences of which I give:

Principio quis nescit primam hominis ætatem multò lætissimam, multoque omnibus gratissimam esse? Quid est enim illud in infantibus, quod sic exosculamur, sic amplectimur, sic fovemus . . . ?

Deinde quæ succedit huic adolescentia, quæ est apud omnes gratiosa, quàm candidè favent omnes, quàm studiosè provehant, quàm officiosè porrigunt auxiliares manus?

Mentior, nisi mox ubi grandiores facti, per rerum usum, ac disciplinas virile quiddam sapere cœperint, continuo deflorescit formæ nitor, languescit

alacritas, frigescit lepos, labascit vigor. Quóque longius à me subducitur, hoc minùs minusque vivit, donec succedat τὸ χαλεπὸν γῆρας, id est, molesta senectus.

A further parallel, interesting because it is concerning quite a different subject, is to be found in Rosalind's complaint against Cupid at the end of the first scene of the fourth act, as "that blind rascally boy that abuses everyone's eyes because his own are out." Cf. *Praise of Folly* (p. 36):

An non Cupido ille omnis necessitudinis autor & parens, prorsum oculis captus est, cui quemadmodum τὰ μὴ καλὰ καλὰ πέφανται, itidem inter vos quoque efficit, ut suum cuique pulchrum videatur, ut cascus cascam, perinde ut pupus pupam deamet.

In view of these various resemblances it is worth consideration whether the following note, found on the same page as the comparison of human life to a drama, is not the suggestion for Jaques' puzzling reference to a "Greek invocation to call fools into a circle":

Notum est illud Diogenis, qui cùm conscenso suggesto, subinde clamasset velut concionaturus, ἀκούσατε ἄνθρωποι, id est, *audite homines*. Jámq; frequens multitudo concurrens, juberet quæ vellet proloqui. *Ego*, inquit, *homines convocavi, in vobis quid hominis video?* significans non esse dicendos homines, qui more brutorum animantium affectibus ducerentur, non ratione.

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